

# Stamp Out Hunger sets sights on 55,000 pounds of food in Monroe County

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The Herald-Times  
April 26, 2019

Much like the motto of the United States Postal Service, members of the South Central Indiana Letter Carrier association is ready to collect food next month — rain or shine.

The 27th Stamp Out Hunger food drive, facilitated nationwide by the National Association of Letter Carriers and United Way, is set to take place May 11. People are encouraged to place food items near their mailbox, or wherever they may collect their mail. Locally, letter carriers and volunteers will collect the food and donate it to Hoosier Hills Food Bank.

The South Central Indiana branch of letter carriers hopes to collect 100,000 pounds of food this year, surpassing last year's 91,000 collected. In order to achieve this goal, 55,000 will need to be collected from Monroe County.

“If each person put out one item, the goal would be surpassed,” branch president Josh Peterson said. To make it even easier, each residence will receive a Kroger-donated plastic bag to set food items in. People can expect them in their mail boxes starting May 4.

The bags have been folded by Hoosier Hills Food Bank volunteers every day since January, Brandon Bartley, manager of food sourcing at HHFB, said. Planning for the next year's event starts in October.

For years, Stamp Out Hunger has been the largest food drive that supports HHFB. The hope each year is that the food donated in May will fill food bank shelves through August, when children go back to school. But the food tends to run out in the middle of July, Bartley said.

“Hunger in general ramps up in the summer. It's on people's minds,” Bartley said. “Everybody wants to help out around the holidays, but they forget that kids are out of school and they're not getting those (school meals) they may have gotten otherwise. There's more time in the day, so you have more time to be hungry and to think about what you're missing and what you need.”

Goods most needed are canned meat, canned fruit and canned vegetables. Canned goods are particularly requested because they are some of the most expensive items for food pantries to buy. People are asked to not donate food with an expired use-by date, open packages, perishable foods or food in glass jars.

Benefits of the food drive beyond getting food that will last the food bank until July includes having more variety in food items than normal. Last year, Stamp Out Hunger was a source of 41,474 pounds of food.

No matter what people choose to donate, letter carriers will be looking for the plastic bags of items that day.

“As the mail comes out of the truck, it fills up with food,” Peterson said.